

# IN THE LINE OF FIRE

By Ken Testorff,  
Naval Safety Center

**L**ocked and loaded...the way it should be,” declared a gun owner, as he showed his Beretta .40-caliber handgun to guests at his home for a barbecue and birthday party.

The homeowner had taken the guests on a tour of his residence. While in the master bedroom, he took out his handgun and showed everyone the clip was full of hollow-point bullets. He then put one of the bullets into the chamber and walked out on the patio to where other guests were gathered, including a PO3 who was sitting on the patio stoop.

While standing in the doorway messing with his gun, the owner started pointing it around. When he aimed it at the PO3, she told him not to, but, about five seconds later, the gun accidentally discharged. The round hit her upper right thigh and traveled into her lower abdominal area before exiting through the left buttock.

Alcohol was present at the party. In fact, the PO3 said when she first met the homeowner at the barracks, he had appeared to be very intoxicated—a fact borne out in his 0.132 BAC. He pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor violation of possessing and handling a firearm while under the influence of alcohol. He also was charged with a gross misdemeanor of aiming and discharging a firearm at a human being where a person might be endangered.

This mishap demonstrates that drinking and driving isn't the only mix that doesn't work; booze and firearms is another. As noted in the mishap report, “As long as our Sailors continue to use alcohol and irresponsibly expose themselves and others to hazardous situations, we will continue to see these types of unnecessary incidents.”

In a separate case, another PO3 was trying to free a round that was jammed in the slide of his room-

mate's .25-caliber pistol. He pulled back the slide, which, in turn, repositioned the round, and the gun discharged. The bullet hit the PO3's foot, and he lost four workdays. He also spent 30 days on light duty and required physical therapy.

The victim was counseled on the importance of never trying to clear a loaded weapon indoors and always knowing exactly where a gun is pointed.

Here are some other tips to remember when handling firearms:

- Assume they are loaded until proven otherwise.
- Never clean a weapon while it's loaded.
- Ensure the safety devices are engaged. Remember the saying, “If you see red, you're dead.” This statement refers to the red color on most safety mechanisms. A red dot or red switch usually indicates safety locks are off.
- Stay alert while cleaning a weapon. Fatigue plays a big role in any evolution. For example, you never would want to get in your car and drive a long distance without being well-rested. The same principle applies to handling weapons.
- Read the instructions, mentally review safety precautions, and take classes on weapons handling.
- Never take a gun for granted.

The Navy loses Sailors every year in mishaps that could have been prevented. Whether you use a gun for recreation or on the job, planning is the key to avoiding mishaps. The solution may be as simple as asking for help or using the right safety equipment. Take time to evaluate the precautions and risks of a task before you start it. ■

